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ABSTRACT

This paper deals with the future directions of early childhood education in New Zealand, and what the Early Childhood Education Project has done to enhance the structures and funding required to support high quality education. The objectives of this project are to provide a rigorous and coherent review of the current situation and access of early education in Aotearoa, New Zealand; to contribute towards a comprehensive policy for Maori education; and to recognize the diversity of organizations, cultures, and communities. The report provides background information on the development of the Early Childhood Education Project since April 1995, and introduces the organizations represented on the project team. The key issues that are discussed include managing the funding and administration of services, meeting the costs of provision on the present level of funding, providing access to all sectors of the community, and obtaining necessary support from government agencies. (MOK)

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THE COST OF QUALITY

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Address to the national seminar
"Assessing and improving quality in early childhood centres"
16-17 May 1996

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Ko Papatuanuku kei raro
Tena korua
E nga mana
E nga iwi
E nga hau e wha
Tena koutou, tena koutou, tena koutou katoa

This national seminar on assessing and improving quality in early childhood centres comes at a good time. In the last seven years early childhood education has had more than its fair share of change. Educational administration, funding arrangements, regulatory and legislative requirements have been radically altered. In those same years the importance of high quality education and how to enhance quality has been given considerable thought by early childhood organisations. The thinking about quality did not go hand in hand with the funding and support needed to achieve the quality objectives. Indeed in 1991, funding for under-two-year olds was reduced by 38 percent, and other hourly funding rates remained static, while costs increased. Until the 1995 budget, new government funding largely went into increasing places but not into enhancing the quality of centres.

This retrenchment by the state has had costs for early childhood education. There appears to be an erosion of high quality, publicly funded early childhood education. There are some shameful cases of early childhood centres that have failed badly to reach important licensing standards as Sharon Ellis evidenced this morning. The Education Review Office reviews of these centres indicate that the well-being of children is not safeguarded. I'm not talking about minor matters that can be easily fixed, but significant problems where health, safety, staffing and programme requirements were not fulfilled.

So, I am very pleased to have the opportunity to talk to you today about the work being done by the early childhood education project on the future directions of early childhood education. The project aims to pinpoint the structures and funding required to support high quality early childhood education.

A feature of early childhood education policy development since 1990 has been the carrying out of "top down" reviews with very little appropriate consultation with those in the field. Most of us here remember the 1991 and 1993 reviews of funding that were carried out by officials behind closed doors. The collaborative work, the Lopdell

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House courses, the involvement of the sector in policy development that were a feature of the 1980's flew out the window. With that too came a focus on individualism and the key role of organisations to represent the collective views and wisdom of groups - the union, the national organisations - was given lower regard.

Yesterday was the fifth anniversary of the Employment Contracts Act - another piece of legislation that eroded collectivism in bargaining arrangements for workers in New Zealand. A point that has not gone unnoticed in this conference is the low pay and inadequate employment conditions of staff in early childhood centres. Of course the Employment Contracts Act has been a major contributor in keeping workers out of collective coverage, and pay rates at an inadequate minimum.

It is against this background that NZEI Te Riu Roa resolved to work in partnership with other early childhood organisations on a major project on the future directions of early childhood education. The organisations share a conviction that the early childhood sector must take the initiative in developing proposals that will take the whole sector forward on a sound basis into the 21st century. People in early childhood education need to work together to find the best way forward for the diverse groups in the early childhood sector.

In April 1995 the project team came together. The membership was composed on the basis that:

- each service within early childhood education were represented;
- employers, workers and tangata whanua were represented;
- where possible a single, national organisation was represented, if not, the largest single group;
- the focus was on community-based services.

Organisations represented on the project team were:

Pacific Islands Early Childhood Education Council Aotearoa
Te Kohanga Reo Trust
New Zealand Playcentre Federation
Te Tari Puna Ora o Aotearoa - New Zealand Childcare Association
New Zealand Educational Institute - Te Riu Roa
New Zealand Family Day Care Association
Te Putahi Kura Puhou o Aotearoa - New Zealand Free Kindergarten Associations.

The important aspect of our work is that it has been done by people on the ground working in centres as staff and parents.

Terms of reference for the project were drafted at the first meeting in April 1995, sent out for consultation with the sector and finalised in the second meeting in July 1995. The agreed terms of reference were:

- To provide a rigorous and coherent review of:
  (a) the current situation of early education in Aotearoa, New Zealand; and
  (b) access of children to early childhood education in Aotearoa, New Zealand.
- To contribute towards a comprehensive policy for Maori education.
- To recognise and value diversity of organisations, diversity of cultures and diversity of communities.

- To examine the relationships between the work of various government agencies and the early childhood providers in order to establish their contribution to quality education for young children.
- To examine the extent to which government legislation supports quality education for young children.
- To develop proposals on the structures and funding required to ensure quality education for young children.
- To build widespread understanding and support for the proposals.
- To aim to present a draft report to the Early Childhood Convention in September 1995 and complete the project in the early months of 1996.

We have met the timeframes and they are important. This year 1996 is an election year, the first election under MMP. There is nothing like an election to wonderfully focus the minds of politicians. We want our final proposals to have widespread public support so we can use our collective voice to influence education policy.

The project team placed an emphasis on consultation with the wider early childhood community at all stages of the project. Project team members consulted within their own organisations and established consultation networks to explore the wide range of views. The wider early childhood constituency was invited to participate and to be kept informed. Cathy Wylie talked yesterday of the power of research to hold up and mirror so that people can see their own reflection. None of the findings from the early childhood project should come as a surprise to practitioners. They represent the everyday experiences of the people involved in early childhood centres throughout New Zealand. What is unique is that the report gives a voice to practitioners who have developed proposals in keeping with the diverse services. This report will make visible the situation and provide a focus for action.

First, I want to look at the funding of early childhood services. There are a variety of funding sources.

Government funding:

- Ministry of Education bulk funding for licensed and unlicensed centres;
- Ministry of Education discretionary grants and loans;
- Department of Social Welfare childcare subsidy;
- Special Education Services assistance for children with special needs.

Non-government funding:

- parent donations;
- parent fees;
- fundraising;
- donated goods and services.

Unfunded value:

- volunteer hours worked;
- costs borne by volunteers;
- staff hours unpaid;
- costs borne by staff.

In our project report we have focussed on government funding. And because other funding sources provide such a vital contribution, the project team through NZEI Te Riu Roa have commissioned Coopers and Lybrand economist Suzanne Snively to identify and quantify all the costs of early childhood services. What came through in all our discussions was the vast contribution of volunteers and the burgeoning administrative and fundraising workload. The measuring and costing of voluntary work began with the project team designing a survey and worklogs to identify the extent and nature of volunteer contributions in each of the diverse early childhood services. The people working in centres and organisations who have filled in these, have said they are amazed at how much they actually do. When it came to recording their time, the volunteer contribution was far more than they had thought. This research will be completed later this year and will form a separate report. The initial responses clearly demonstrate the extent to which the early childhood services are subsidised by the communities they serve. Government's contribution pales against this volunteer contribution.

For a start, the project report makes comparison with the schools sector. It is an historical accident that schooling begins at age five years when limited government funding and support is replaced with free state provision. Early childhood education receives only about 4% of Vote: Education. Per child spending on early childhood education is less then per child spending on primary education after rates have been adjusted for length of time spent in each service. In other OECD countries by comparison, the mean expenditure for early childhood education is higher than for primary education (OECD 1992). These comparisons need to be made. And within early childhood, Parents as First Teachers is fully funded to cover the costs of salaries, professional development and operational costs, while centre-based services receive a funding subsidy.

In the consultation, the project team asked questions of networks and organisations that are similar to what we have been discussing in this seminar - questions about how we define quality and the systems we use to ensure quality outcomes, the factors that prevent the achievement of quality, the support from legislation and government agencies. From the many responses, we reviewed the current situation for early childhood services.

The project team gathered evidence of problems for all sectors in achieving their own goals for high quality provision. The key issues that emerged were the difficulty services have in:

1. managing the funding and administration of the services;
2. meeting the costs of provision on the present level of funding;
3. providing access to all sectors of the community;
4. obtaining all the necessary support from government agencies.

This morning's panel was asked what the new policies mean for centres. The question wasn't answered. I don't know if that was the brief for the panelists or whether they simply don't know. I'll give you the answers on behalf of those people working in services who were part of our consultations.

I want to highlight some of the key findings in each of these areas:

1. Managing the funding and administration of the services

Goals

In general, centres and district and regional organisations have a varied ability to manage effectively. One of the key problems in managing services is the uncertainty about long-term funding policy and therefore the extent to which budgets can be planned. There have been U turns in early childhood funding policy since 1989, new requirements to comply with legislation have been made, the Consumer Price Index has changed by 12.6%, in the kindergarten service a pay increase negotiated by the State Services Commission was not funded by the government. How can organisations operate effectively when they don't know from one year to the next what their budget will be?

Administration requirements from outside agencies are arduous. "Filling in wads of paper to meet outside requirements", especially when "the paper work doesn't fit the service" was a problem. The administration of the childcare subsidy and the carrying of the cost of retrospective payments are difficulties for centres. The project team was told of the humiliation in applying for the subsidy and also having to reapply and prove eligibility. We were told of a person with a child with a disability having to prove the disability every six months. The "9 + 12" rule which requires bulk funding to cease if the child is absent for more than nine calendar days without parent notification and the roll verifications have centre staff chasing up families, putting pressure on families to attend the centre and spending hours on administration. Staff are caught between the need to make sure the funds come in and making sure families are well supported in positive relationships. Their time could be better used.

The workload for volunteers is heavy and there are evident difficulties in getting parents/caregivers onto committees or councils. Partnership with parents/caregivers is an essential feature of high quality education, but the high workload, the financial difficulties and the poor support are such that there are questions about how much volunteers are prepared to sustain their input.

Another comparison with the schools' sector, in the early childhood sector parents on management committees receive no government support for training or costs.

In the schools' sector, government provides:

- an operational grant from which can be paid a sitting fee for board of trustees members (amount set by board itself);
- training of new boards of trustees members provided by NZ School Trustees Association on contract to the Ministry ($1.750 million allocated for 1995/96);
- funding for NZ School Trustees Association to provide certain "outputs" ranging from industrial advice to administration of study awards ($600,000 allocated for 1995/96);
- through the Education Act, the constitution of the board of trustees and provision for a commissioner to be appointed in certain instances.

Another question in funding and administration of services is accountability.

When bulk funding was introduced in 1990 there were no set accountability measures, despite a Parent Advocacy Council Hearing and two reviews by the Education Review Office, which showed that government funds could be used by private owners for the improvement of their own assets, rather than improving the quality of education services. The Parent Advocacy Council reached the view that privately owned early childhood institutions should be fully accountable to their parent communities and to the government for the way they spend the bulk grant.

There are different financial accountability requirements for private and community-based services. The private sector does not have to report on parent fees or other income sources or where those are spent; the community-based services provide a full statement of all income and expenditure. The private sector is also less accountable to its families in a formal sense. There is no formal requirement to involve parents/whanau as decision-makers on management - while in the community-based sector, the rules for the composition of trusts and incorporated societies guarantee this involvement.

The misuse of government funding has continued with the latest example being the Wallace House Childcare Centre - bankrupted in January 1994 having paid $18,000 of government funding to the Bread of Life Bakery and donated a further $20,000 to church groups while workers were unpaid.

2. **Meeting the costs under the present level of funding**

Insufficient funding has had a key impact on staffing of services, the ability to deliver an appropriate curriculum for Maori and for Pacific Islands children and access of children to high quality services.

We collected evidence on low rates of pay and poor working conditions across all services. We know there is a problem in recruiting, training and keeping qualified staff.

Two examples:
Qualified and fluent speakers are needed to work in Pacific Islands centres. But graduates from Pacific Islands diploma programmes are not able to get salaried jobs in unlicensed Pacific Islands centres because the funding levels are so low. Many of these graduates opt to work in other services.

Forty-five percent of kindergarten teaching positions were advertised in 1995. There is a shortage of trained kindergarten teacher relievers throughout the country and a major factor in this is the low pay.

There are significant barriers for staff wanting to undertake training - cost of courses, low income and inability to repay loans, type of training offered, access to training. The points that Helen May raised this morning crystallised these barriers.

Regulation staff:child ratios and group size are a minimum requirement, but we know that good ratios and small group sizes are a feature of quality education. Yet the roll-based funding formula puts pressure on centres to push up group sizes and always have full rolls when this is not in the interests of children.

Kohanga reo are under funded to provide immersion education. Mainstream services offering programmes using te reo Maori also need support.

Some issues identified for Maori education include:

- there are not enough fluent Maori speakers;
- Maori staff spend a lot of family and leisure time learning te reo me nga tikanga Maori;
- staff working in Maori education have a greater workload than staff in English medium programmes.

There are significant problems in the provision of Pacific Islands early childhood education which were pinpointed by PIECCA and Pacific Islands centres.

- no established linkage between the Pacific Islands early childhood curriculum and the school curriculum;
- low participation of children in early childhood education;
- not enough qualified Pacific Islands teachers;
- few resources to support Pacific Islands teaching and learning;
- limited understanding of management and administration of centres;
- varied understanding by parents, teachers and students of the value and philosophy of Pacific Islands early childhood education;

A pressing issue is the approximately 200 unlicensed Pacific Islands centres, some of which have been operating for as long as six years.

The centres are in a "catch 22" situation - unable to raise the funding to enable them to meet licensing requirements, they therefore attract a lower level of funding than if they are licensed.

3. **Providing access to all sectors of the community**

The key difficulties in providing access relate to funding shortfalls and insufficient planning and co-ordination of services. Particular centres are under stress:

- small rural centres with limited base funding which nevertheless have similar operational costs to larger centres;
- mobile kindergartens whose costs are not met by the national roll on which funding is based;
- centres in low socio-economic communities whose ability to fund-raise is less than other communities.

The project team was told of playcentres where people have to travel 2½ hours to get to the centre. They may therefore attend only once or twice a month.

Income, cost, location of centres and lack of transport are barriers for some families. The low levels of funding and enrolment-based formula take no account of those difficulties.

There is a high cost in establishing centres and the pool of funding in the discretionary grants scheme is capped. In 1995/96, 538 centres applied for a

grant and only 164 were successful. The project team were told of centres which had met all the criteria to gain a discretionary grant - had gone through the hoops getting planning permission, raising funds, getting a community needs assessment but kept getting turned down for a grant because there isn't enough in the capped fund.

There is evident frustration that a centre can meet all the criteria but still not obtain a grant. Unlicensed centres can remain unlicensed long term.

4. Relationships with government agencies

The government agencies working in the education sector have a key role to play in providing policies, resources and advisory services and in setting and monitoring of standards. Richard Clifford, speaking at the Sixth Early Childhood Convention in Auckland in September 1995, showed that stringent regulations and high standards for early childhood education services, appropriate monitoring of those standards and a sound advisory and support service make a difference to quality.

The project report acknowledges positive initiatives taken by the government ministries and agencies such as the funding of the development of Te Whaariki, the financial support for the early childhood code of ethics, the Teacher Registration Board funding of the establishment of a network of trained and experienced registration supervisors. The efforts of the Ministry of Education to consult the sector through the Early Childhood Advisory Committee and on the Quality Funding Working Group are a beginning but do not go far enough to put in place a genuine consultative partnership.

The project team identified features of the government agencies that frustrate the development of quality and made recommendations on how the features and systems can be improved so that the agencies can better meet the needs of the early childhood services, children and families.

The project team's investigations revealed problems with government agencies:

- inadequate communication and co-ordination between government agencies, and within government agencies;
- that the accuracy and consistency of information offered is often poor;
- inadequate involvement of the sector in policy decisions at national, regional and local levels;
- low regulated standards, inappropriate and ineffective monitoring of standards and failure to act effectively on low quality centres;
- lack of specialised early childhood qualifications and experience of personnel;
- limited goals for early childhood education, and poor information, statistics and research.

A prime example is the botch-up in the area of training and qualifications.

In this seminar many speakers have made reference to the fact that the training and qualifications of staff and adults working with young children are major determinants of the quality of education that young children receive.

A number of government agencies are involved in training and qualifications. There are different responsibilities taken by the Ministry of Education, NZ Qualifications Authority, Teacher Registration Board and Education Training & Support Agency. I refer to the discussion this morning.

The Teacher Registration Board determines the standards for registration as a teacher.

The New Zealand Qualifications Authority has responsibility for:

- recognising training courses and training providers;
- co-ordinating the development of unit standards and their placement on the Qualifications Framework;
- developing a "points" system for early childhood licensing purposes including providing a system for eligible practitioners to reach equivalence to the Diploma of Teaching (ECE);
- developing a new system through the NZQA Consultative Panel for early childhood staff to upgrade their qualifications to meet "quality criteria".

The Secretary of Education is formally responsible for recognition of qualifications by notice in the Gazette.

The Education Training & Support Agency is responsible for the recognition and funding of Industry Training Organisations.

The setting of standards for qualifications of early childhood practitioners has had a chequered history. In 1989 the sector was united around a common goal that the benchmark qualification would be the Diploma of Teaching (Early Childhood Education) or equivalent. A system of equivalency was established to enable people to upgrade to the benchmark qualification. The 1991 budget announced that the so called "qualification" requirement for the year 1995 for persons responsible for early childhood centres would be 100 points rather than the Diploma of Teaching or equivalent. One hundred points is not a qualification and does not necessarily include core components. That was the beginning of widespread confusion about licensing points and qualifications.

Government agencies themselves mis-interpreted the licensing requirement and added to the confusion. For example, the Ministry of Education publication, Pitopito Korero No.5, July 1994 provided information which implies that "points" equate to a qualification. This is not correct.

Further problems were the inconsistent decisions NZQA made in their early years in the assessments of courses for equivalency (e.g. setting of NNEB qualification at 40 points in September 1991 and at 80 points in July 1992).

There have been ideological differences largely between the community-based sector and the private sector over the importance of qualifications and the level at which they should be set. The NZQA Early Childhood Advisory Group set up in 1991 to work on the development of early childhood unit standards was disbanded in April 1994 because it could not reach consensus. The Early Childhood Council, representing mainly private childcare employers, disagreed with the consensus reached by the remaining twelve representatives that the process on development of the unit standards should continue.

Key differences between the Early Childhood Council and the other organisations were over whether qualifications should be set at diploma level seven on the framework, or whether there should also be certificate level qualifications for people working in early childhood education. The Early Childhood Council wanted certificate level qualifications to be established. Others on the Advisory Group wanted to wait until the unit standards were set before determining qualifications. And some Advisory Group members hold the view that qualifications should be set at level seven only, because early childhood educators need this depth of training. What we have heard from researchers would support this.

There were further confusions when the Associate Minister of Education announced new qualification requirements after the government budget in 1995. These were misinterpreted by the Ministry of Education in a circular sent out to all centres in December. The advice had to be rescinded and a new circular sent out in January. There is tremendous frustration and anger within the sector at the mishandling of these issues. There is little acknowledgement that these actions have held back workers from achieving a genuine qualification, undermined the goals of the sector for high standards in training and exasperated the training providers who do want to deliver the benchmark qualification.

Not only did the various government agencies and ministries not co-ordinate with each other, not only did they communicate badly, they didn't even know and understand their own policies. It is no wonder that the sector said through its representatives on the Quality Funding Working Group, "The patience of the sector is near exhaustion as a result of the profound confusion surrounding licensing points and qualifications". In the project we received many examples of these kind of difficulties and our report will make recommendations to address these issues.

The project did not only look at outside influences, it also considered the early childhood services themselves. Most early childhood services have developed their own definitions of quality and many have implemented their own quality assurance systems. Much of what has been talked about in this seminar is described in the report.

Common quality assurances that recurred in discussion were:

- good adult/staff:child ratios;
- parental involvement;
- trained and qualified staff/adults;
- ongoing professional development;
- culturally and developmentally appropriate programmes;
- monitoring and evaluation;
- assessment and professional support;
- safe and healthy environment;
- sound knowledge of the philosophy of the service;
- legislation/regulation.

Additional themes were identified for centre-based services:

- small group size;

- mix age group;
- programme resources;
- appropriate employment policies including employment contract provisions, and for kindergartens and childcare centres in particular;
- administrative personnel;
- membership of professional bodies;
- teacher registration;
- support provided through collective groupings.

The project team identified three key issues that provide challenges for the organisation of early childhood services. These are:

- the essential importance of the full involvement of parents and whanau in decision-making, policy formulation and centre operation;
- the value of centres being part of a regional and national umbrella organisation;
- the importance of services being fully responsive to the needs of their communities.

Proposals

On the basis of its review the project team developed proposals and recommendations for the future funding of early childhood education.

Certain key principles underpin the proposals. These are:

- That services should be of high quality and provide access to all sectors of the community.
- That early childhood education services should be treated on an equitable basis with the schools' sector.

In this presentation I shall focus on the funding proposals although the report makes other recommendations. To use Helen May's words this will require "courageous costing" from the government.

Funding proposals

The goal is for early childhood education services to be universally funded on an equitable basis with the schools' sector by the year 2000.

Eligibility for funding

- There will be a formal requirement for services to include parents/whanau as full, democratically elected representatives on management or to operate with full whanau participation to be eligible for government funding.

- Funding will be linked to quality.

The funding formula for licensed centres

The project team came up with a formula that builds on existing arrangements and addresses the issues raised.

The formula is illustrated in the diagram below.

Funding formula for early childhood education services

Maori immersion	Pacific Islands immersion	Special needs of communities	Remoteness	Special educational needs of children	Equity Funding
Staffing, operations, volunteers					Base Rate

The funding formula comprises base funding to compensate for costs of:

- staff/adults to meet quality ratios, group size and qualification requirements;
- operations;
- support for volunteers.

The universal base funding rate is augmented with equity funding to meet additional costs for particular educational programmes or to assist centres in communities with special needs. Equity funding relates to factors below:

- Maori immersion education;
- Pacific Islands immersion education;
- special needs funding for early childhood centres in communities which meet criteria related to the following factors:
  - low socio-economic status of the families in the centre;
  - high proportion of children for whom English is a second language.
- special educational needs of children;
- remoteness.

General guidelines for equity funding are:

a) Maori immersion funding is to support programmes using te reo Maori as a medium of instruction.

b) Pacific Islands immersion is for the immersion aspect of Pacific Islands education.

c) Special needs of communities is for centres which serve a large proportion of low-income families and/or a high proportion of children for whom English is a second language.

d) Special educational needs of children provides for children identified as "special needs" to allow for specific resources and staffing support.

e) Remoteness funding is to cater for the needs of rural and isolated centres.

Department of Social Welfare subsidy will continue as an interim measure for a limited period, but would be phased out as the plan to raise funding levels is developed.

Discretionary grants and loans will continue but the pool of funding will be increased.

The position of unlicensed centres will be addressed so that these centres are assisted within three years to become licensed. Specific goals aimed at achieving licensing standards set. On reaching all criteria, centres will be assured of receiving a grant.

A pool of funding for upgrading qualifications will be established to cover the costs of course fees, release time and future training needs.

The funding rates will be adjusted annually through an agreed formula so that services can maintain their viability.

The project team recommends a staged implementation, beginning with an across the board increase for all services. Costings are underway - $84.579m to implement the universal base rate described in the Before Five funding proposals. The report of the project team will be published by the end of this month - as an interim report.

We will send it out widely to early childhood organisations and groups which have an interest in the future of young children in New Zealand. We want the final report, to be published in August or September to be one that receives general endorsement so that we can take it to the politicians with a united voice.

The time is right for early childhood education to get back on track. We have a new Minister of Education who told us at the launch of the Education Review, *"We need to repeat some first principles. I am committed to a world-class taxpayer funded education system of the highest quality for New Zealand. Let there be no doubt about that as I begin my term in this difficult portfolio to deal with the challenges that confront us."*

We'll call upon Wyatt Creech to put his money where his mouth is.

We need to turn his words into action for early childhood education.

No reira
Tena koutou tena koutou tena koutou katoa.

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